

School Guide: **I COULD TELL YOU 'BOUT MY LIFE**



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This BYkids School Guide is designed to help teachers expand students' use of this film from passive watching to active, deeply personalized learning. Included are three sample Pathways, each driven by an essential question to challenge students. Use the Pathway questions to start discussions in small groups or with the whole class. We've also added Discussion Starters and Suggested Projects, but we encourage you and your students to follow your own pathways and create your own projects.

BYkids wants our films to be part of compelling, project-based, collaborative learning experiences that are cross-curricular, link cultures and countries by themes we all share, and spur students to develop the competencies needed to become global citizens while mastering necessary college and career readiness skills. Most of all, we want students to value their own stories while learning from the stories of others around the world. We encourage you to share the creativity and knowledge that flourish in your classroom as you and your students expand on these BYkids suggestions and create your own learning units. We'd love it if you would share your discoveries and ideas with us at **BYkids.org!**

BYkids
THEIR WORLD THEIR FILMS

Funding provided by



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ABOUT THE FILM & SOME BACKGROUND

I COULD TELL YOU 'BOUT MY LIFE was filmed, directed and narrated by 19-year-old **Mike Martin**. Mentored by filmmakers Chiemi Karasawa and Hollis Meminger, 19-year-old Michael Martin reflects on his incarceration on Rikers Island and the effects it had on his life.

On April 10th, 2017 New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a law inspired by the “Raise the Age” movement and New York is now raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years old, no longer prosecuting and incarcerating 16- and 17-year-olds as adults. When Michael Martin got arrested at age 17, this law did not exist. As a result, a judge sentenced him to jail time on Rikers Island, New York City’s infamous jail.

In crafting *I Could Tell You 'Bout My Life*, Michael recounts events that led to his incarceration. He describes being bored, “hanging with the wrong crowd” and interviews his 64-year-old grandmother about raising five children in a single bedroom, East Harlem apartment.

When Michael asks his grandmother, Cynthia, how she became his guardian, she recalls how his mother “had problems,” and in order to avoid Michael falling into foster care, she “told that social worker I was taking you home with me.” She describes using a monthly \$231 from the Human Resources Administration and wages earned during 12-hour shifts, Cynthia fed and clothed Michael and his siblings.

As Michael narrates his journey, he raps the chorus from a song he wrote: “*A couple young’uns always breaking rules, never staying true just the summer time blues ... yea I barley even know my mother, always played the block but those was my brothers, ‘cause where I’m from we don’t switch on each other.*” Weaving his biography into a minimalistic backing track, Michael uses rhymes and a GoPro to document his story.

When Michael asks his parole officer if he can imagine a better alternative to incarceration, the officer pauses, “There is no one solution.” Then he cites his belief in “education over incarceration,” and reveals that the expense of incarcerating one individual per year is the monetary equivalent to the cost of an Ivy League education.

In the film’s final moments, Michael asks his grandmother what she sees in him that he does not see in himself. “I see hope. I see love. I see everything in you. I hope and pray that you can see it in yourself. You’re you. Be you”, she says. Since his release, Michael has taken classes at Friends of Island Academy in order to obtain a GED. As Cynthia’s wisdom echoes, Michael confidently strides down the sidewalk to take his GED exam.

Note to Educators: Some of the Pathways in this School Guide focus on the issues that are illuminated around the film, including race, poverty, *Raise the Age* and why we need juvenile justice reform. The film is straightforward and teachers will want to preview it to determine if it is appropriate for their grade levels.

ABOUT MIKE'S MENTORS

Mike's mentors were **Chiemi Karasawa** (award-winning documentary filmmaker and founder of Isotope Films) and **Hollis Meminger** (a Presidential Leadership Scholar and prolific cinematographer with television credits including *The Blacklist*, *Narcos* and *Younger*). Chiemi Karasawa will share a 6-minute excerpt from the full film on public television in 2019.

"By presenting their stories, BYkids give youth an opportunity to be active participants in a global narrative that reaches millions of viewers."

Chiemi Karasawa

"By giving kids from diverse backgrounds around the world tools, skills and guidance to make documentary films, this great organization provides an outlet for sharing personal stories, which in turn brings us closer together as an international community rooted in compassion and understanding."

Former NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg

ABOUT BYkids

BYkids mentors teens to tell their stories through film and share the realities of global inequality and injustice on the world stage. Kids learn citizenry through empathy, using film as a starting point for cross-cultural conversations. **BYkids'** films are viewed and discussed by 248 million teens, educators and their families, creating understanding through storytelling.

Join us at BYkids.org

THE GUIDE

PATHWAY 1

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TELL OUR STORIES AND TO LISTEN TO THE STORIES OF OTHERS?

Mike tells his story, and comments that you can learn from the stories of others. His grandmother, his parole officer, some teachers, classmates, and his mentor, Chiemi Karasawa, all appear and add to the overall story in the film. Exploring ways to tell and to listen to ourselves and others becomes an important message in Mike's film and in his rap.

From the Film

"It's important to tell your story because everyone has a different point of view and you never know when your point of view can help the next person. It's a chance to speak about how you feel... and establish a connection."

~ Mike Martin

Discussion Starters

- What are the different ways Mike tells his story? How does a film help to tell a story? How does Mike's grandmother tell her story? How does she help to tell Mike's story? How does adding other people to the film change Mike's story?
- What facts from the film help you understand it better? Did you know that at age 16 being imprisoned could happen?
- What are the different ways that Mike expresses what he has learned and what he now feels? How does he express themes of hope and determination in a way that touches you? Or if it doesn't touch you, how could his themes be better expressed?

Suggested Projects

- Mike tells his story with film, interviews, music . . . and to lead to a theme of growing into a better person. Create your own story to illustrate in a more personal way how a larger issue has affected your group of friends, your school or town. Note that Mike did not embarrass anyone (or himself) with extremely private moments or embarrassing film, but he included a lot of viewpoints to make his film.
- With a small group, create a film, skit, podcast, or other form of expression to relate everyday life to a larger theme. You may want to start with a real theme such as racism, and create fictional characters and situations – even science fiction or fantasy. Write your script with your group be sure that each person has an important role. Use your creation to show ways to grow despite setbacks and problems.
- Mike shows ways to use music and art to express a theme that is important to him. Write and perform or record your own rap or other type of music, create art, dance, or another creative expression to highlight an important theme like Mike's. You may work alone or with a group. Have a "My Theme" day in class or in your school to perform. To get started, you could use a line from Mike's rap.

THE GUIDE (continued)

PATHWAY 2

HOW CAN YOU HELP IMPROVE SYSTEMS AND ATTITUDES THAT NEED TO BE IMPROVED?

Ways to improve the juvenile justice system and other systems and attitudes are explored in the film, but there is much more work to do.

From the Film

“A couple young’uns always breaking rules, never staying true just the summer time blues ... yea I barley even know my mother, always played the block but those was my brothers, ‘cause where I’m from we don’t switch on each other.”

~ from the chorus of one of Mike’s rap songs in the film

Discussion Starters

- Mike grew up in poverty, and experienced racism and violence. How do poverty and racial discrimination affect children? Adults?
- There are programs to help with social and economic issues, and laws against racism and violence. How can these be made more effective?
- Large systems are difficult to get 100% perfect. The juvenile justice system, foster care, encounters with police, disagreements with other people . . . Mike has not given up. How can you help change a system?

Suggested Projects

- How do poverty, racism, juvenile incarceration and other themes from the film impact your school, town, state or the country? How can you find out? What have you observed yourself? Where could you get data on their impact? With your class or a small group, select a theme and research it to get data, e.g. programs or laws that exist, results of those programs, statistics about the life expectancy and earning power of different groups? Make a poster or video presentation to present your group’s findings. Add your group’s conclusions and opinions, based on logic and evidence.
- With a group or your class, create a communications campaign to educate your school about a theme such as juvenile justice in your state or in the country. Research the issue and get the facts first. Then design your campaign to continue over a period of time. Decide on your audience – is it just your friends, or will you reach wider to your school? Decide also on how to craft your message so that your audience understands why you think the problems should be solved. Be sure to include a teacher or adult in your plans.
- With a group or your class, create a script to interview town government officials about a theme or issue that concerns you. Video the statements after asking permission to record them. Then put together your news report on how different officials in your town reacted. You may want to add a separate section to express the opinions of your group about the report. Keep your opinions and remarks evidence-based, but identify where officials were not well-informed or truthful. You may want to go back to the officials to clarify or correct them where you think they were incorrect. You may want to make this newscast a regular occurrence.

THE GUIDE (continued)

PATHWAY 3

HOW DOES CHANGE HAPPEN?

Everyone makes mistakes, but Mike made a big one. Still, he learned from it and is positive and determined to change his life even more.

From the Film

“I see hope. I see love. I see everything in you. I hope and pray that you can see it in yourself. You’re you. Be you.”

~ Michael’s grandmother

Discussion Starters

- Mike changed, went to school, has passed 4 of 5 exams to get his GED (high school diploma,) and seeks a career and a bright future. But that wasn’t easy. How and why did Mike change personally?
- Why does Mike think that education is so important to make a positive change? Does he seem proud to have made progress in his education? Why? How did he get help?
- Mike’s parole officer and others talk about going forward three steps, then backwards one, but keeping on going. That can be hard. What helps? Does everyone struggle sometimes? What can you do when you need help?
- How did Mike set new goals? How can you set goals that are reachable?

Suggested Projects

- Form a study group, and set some short-term goals for education. They could be to learn how to write better, how to make a better presentation, how to use a specific math skill better. Decide on an assignment for your group that will help everyone with one goal. Ask for help – from your teacher, an older student, or a friend who has already mastered that skill. Work together to reach your goal. Keep a chart for your group’s goals. Encourage each other, help each other, and respect each person’s struggles. Your teacher or a parent can help you with ways to improve, and ways to find new problems that challenge you.
- Make your individual list of goals for yourself. Pick one goal for each year, then create a timeline month-by-month to reach each goal. Make a poster showing where you want to be in five years.
- Write a letter to yourself when you were 5 years younger than you are now. Tell yourself what you have learned, where you made mistakes, and how you corrected them. Identify ways you still want to change. Tell your younger self how to change, and how to be resilient and overcome hardship, as well as what you will do differently now that you are older. If you are comfortable sharing this, share it with your class, but remember that it is personal and you need to be supportive of your classmates.

COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS

Dear Educator,

You and your students, in defining the creative and collaborative details of each Pathway and Project, will implement many different standards not limited to any one content area but focused on critical and rigorous, evidence-based thinking. Following are provided some College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards, Common Core ELA and Math standards, and Next Gen Science Standards, but you and your students will go beyond those limited standards. We hope you will share your experiences and ideas at BYkids.org.

PATHWAY 1

CCSS ELA College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards

- CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes and analyze their development.
- CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.
- CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes content and style.
- CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content in diverse media and formats.
- CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.
- CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCRA.W.6 Use technology to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
- CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing your own clearly and persuasively.
- CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- CCRA.SL.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- CCRA.SL.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks.

CCSS Standards of Mathematical Practice

- MP3 Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
- MP7 Look for and make use of structure.

PATHWAY 2

CCSS ELA College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards

- CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes and analyze their development.
- CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.
- CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes content and style.
- CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content in diverse media and formats.
- CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a work,

including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory text to examine and convey complex ideas.

CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.W.6 Use technology to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCRA.W.7 Conduct research based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject.

CCRA.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess and credibility and accuracy of each, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing your own clearly and persuasively.

CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCRA.SL.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.SL.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

CCRA.SL.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks.

CCSS Standards of Mathematical Practice

MP1 Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.

MP2 Reason abstractly and quantitatively.

MP3 Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.

MP4 Model with mathematics.

MP5 Use appropriate tools strategically.

MP6 Attend to precision.

MP7 Look for and make use of structure.

MP8 Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

NEXT GEN SCIENCE STANDARDS, SCIENTIFIC and ENGINEERING PRACTICES

SEP 1 Ask questions and define problems

SEP 4 Analyze and interpret data.

SEP 5 Use mathematics and computational thinking.

SEP 7 Engage in argument from evidence.

SEP 8 Obtain, evaluate, and communicate information.

PATHWAY 3

CCSS ELA College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards

CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact.

CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes content and style.

CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.W.10 Write routinely for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing your own clearly and persuasively.

CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence so that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCRA.SL.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks.

CCSS Standards of Mathematical Practice

MP3 Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.

MP7 Look for and make use of structure.

MP8 Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

NEXT GEN SCIENCE STANDARDS, SCIENTIFIC and ENGINEERING PRACTICES

SEP 1 Ask questions and define problems

SEP 8 Obtain, evaluate, and communicate information.